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Will CIA Ever Reach Its Optimum?

The anticipated retirement in November of the Central Intelligence Agency's director, Allen W. Dulles, focuses attention once again upon this nation's most secretive organization and its operations so vitally linked with national security.

In mid-summer, the White House master of fact reported that Dulles would retire "in a few months." A reliable news magazine reported that Dulles already was grooming his successor and would step down as director of the intelligence agency sometime in October. No official sources would confirm or deny the allegation and the matter soon moved off the front pages and out of the public's mind. Unless the climate of the cold war alters the situation, the Central Intelligence Agency will be taken over by John A. McCone in November, however inopportune the change-over may be.

The CIA became this nation's "cloak-and-dagger" outfit in 1947 as the lineal descendant of the World War II Office of Strategic Services. It was hoped that the CIA would be the answer to the unmethodical and often haphazard way intelligence was gathered and analyzed during World War II, which was hardly more at times than "over the coffee cup" discussions. Congress went to great lengths to provide the new organization with enough secrecy so that it could develop into a systematic and highly functional body to protect the welfare of the country.

The highly qualified Dulles was appointed director in 1953, but even he wasn't able to achieve a miracle and soon the organization was in hot water and facing investigation itself for the U2 affair and the Cuban fiasco. It was also criticized for being asleep at the switch on the Korean invasion and for being left flat-footed by the Iraq coup. In comparison to foreign intelligence organizations such as exist in France and England, ours leave much to be desired, but it seems doubtful that improvements are coming through replacement of personnel.

This nation apparently has come upon a blind spot which obscures the process of creating a mature and effective CIA. Until the clandestine operations of this body are removed from political exploitation and snap-judgment criticisms, they can never reach the orderliness and performance of which they are capable. And until this nation's intelligence staff becomes the best in the world, its people cannot afford the luxury of complacency.

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